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RUSSIAN RAILWAYS TOWARDS INDIA

BY

COLONEL C. E. DE LA POER BERESFORD

Late Military Attaché at St. Petersburg



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SIR THOMAS HOLDICH: Although at present public interest concerning the far-off frontier of Afghanistan is somewhat discounted owing to the miserable position in which Russia finds herself to-day, the subject will continue to be of undying interest so long as Russia and England remain as they are in Asia. As to railways in Central Asia, they must always have a peculiar interest, because further extension towards Afghanistan can only have a strategic military meaning. Under no circumstances can they be considered purely as a commercial venture. They are more or less a disguised threat to peace on the frontier. We shall this afternoon be able to hear much more on this question from Colonel de la Poer Beresford, who has had unusual opportunities as Military Attaché at St. Petersburg for studying the subject. I have, therefore, very much pleasure in calling upon Colonel Beresford to read his paper.

[Before reading his paper, Colonel de la Poer Beresford gave a few words of explanation about a map which he had brought to illustrate and to make clear his remarks. It was, he said, a Russian map published in St. Petersburg, but not officially, and was entitled 'Railway Lines to India.' It had been carefully copied by a friend, but he explained that the mountains were not marked sufficiently clearly, and the existing and projected railway-lines were hardly so conspicuous as they ought to be. But the map was of special interest, and would be of considerable help to the audience in following his remarks.]

The completion of the line from Orenbùrg to Tâshkènt gives Russia direct rail communication from St. Petersburg to Kûshk post on the frontier of Afghanistan. From St. Petersburg to Orenbùrg is about 1,230

miles. From Orenbùrg to Tâshkènt the distance is 1,500 miles, and from Tâshkènt, viâ Samarkànd and Merv to Kûshk post, about 450 miles. It is possible to proceed to Kûshk post viâ Rostov on the Don, Petrovsk and Bakû, to embark there for Krasnovòdsk on the East Caspian shore, and to entrain there again for Askhabàd and Merv. These are the existing lines of railway towards India. The projected lines shown on the map are not yet commenced. An exception to this statement must be made, as will be seen later on, as regards the line from Chârjui on the Amû to Termèz on the same river. Another line that must be considered is the Batûm-Tiflis-Erivân. It is proposed to carry this eventually from the Russo-Persian frontier at Julfa, near Nakhitchevân, through the Persian provinces of Azerbidjad, Kâsvîn, Teherân, and Khorassân. To this I will come presently. At this moment the rail-head is some miles short of the Persian frontier. All the lines I have mentioned are single lines, with the broad Russian gauge. I have visited Erivân, Orenbùrg, and Tâshkènt, and watched the construction of the various lines. They, like all railways in Russia, are laid on transverse sleepers, to which they are pinned down by large nails. Fish-plates at the joints give extra security, but chairs are unknown. With such an arrangement much ballast is necessary to ensure ordinary stability. Unfortunately for Russia, her Asiatic lines run, as a rule, through sandy countries where stone is rarely found. It is impossible, then, to run heavy trains at great speed over these lines. Nevertheless, the late war in Manchuria has shown us of what one line, the Trans-Siberian, is capable.

Prince Hilkoff laid two great railways in Asia—the Trans-Siberian and the Orenbùrg-Tâshkènt. The

Central Asian, formerly called the Transcaspian, was thought out by Skòbeleff; but General Ànnenkoff actually bridged the black sand (Kàra-Kûm). Ûzun-Àda, the original starting-point, no longer exists. It is from Krasnovòdsk, where the condensers are, that the rails from piers in the Caspian run on to Andijàn, 1,350 miles away. The first section of the line to Mulla-Kari was finished in December, 1880. Water-trains overcame the difficulty of the dry desert. These still ply on the line. Huge vats, truncated pyramids in form, fixed on waggons convey the precious fluid. The line was laid from Kizil-Àrvàt to Merv, 352 English miles, in fourteen months.

From Krasnovòdsk to Askhabàd is a desert journey of eighteen hours. The traveller passes through the country of the Yòmùd Turkomàns, entering the Akhàl-Tekké oasis at Ûzun-Sû, and skirting the base of Kopet Dâgh, or Damán-i-Kûh. It has been said that a railway was projected to run from Askhabàd to Meshèd, viâ Firuzè and the Gûlistàn hills. But I saw no sign of such a thing three years ago. The projected line to Meshèd will not pass this way. An error in Central Asian cartography is that many places, Askhabàd, Luftabàd, etc., are shown in our maps as fortresses. They are guileless of defensive works. The only fortress is Kûshk post, on the Afghàn frontier. Along the railway in the Akhàl-Tekké oasis are seen the Persian towers—for Shâh-Abbàs ruled up to Karà-Kûm—into which the inhabitants fled at the approach of the Turkomàns. A mounted Tekké here and there, his black stallion's coat glistening in the sun, is all that remains of the Alamàns that swept the plains of Khorassàn. The hardy Turkomàn horse is almost extinct.

In this nearly rainless district water is so precious

that it is hoarded underground ! When found beneath the surface it is led along underneath it by a system of horizontal tunnels ventilated by vertical shafts. It is thus brought to the level of the land to be irrigated. These wells are styled *kàrez*, the ordinary cylindrical cuttings being named *chàh*. From Askhabàd to Giaours we are still in the Akhàl-Tekké oasis ; but thence the rails are laid across the Kàra-Kûm. Thirty miles beyond Dûshàk a bridge spans the Tèjend, whose waters mingle with the sand among the tall reeds that cover the plain to the north. Only 300 miles to the south the Tèjend flows, as the Hari Rûd, under the walls of Herât. It waters the country of the Sârik Turkomàns. Their beautiful carpets are known in the trade as Pendjeh rugs. Seven hours from Askhabàd the engine draws up at a commonplace station lit by petroleum lamps. A noisy crowd of Russian ladies, officers, Persians, and Úsbègs surround the train. The Murghàb here is but a muddy stream, whose waters are soon lost in the desert. To the east is a high, continuous wall of earth. Nearer, a few miserable houses and dust-smothered locust-bean trees. Yet the place has a famous history. Here Timûr the Lame fought nine battles. This is Merv, *Áin-i-jahàn*, the Eye of the World.

The district between Merv and Bokhàra is an irregular, wind-swept sea of sand. Sven Hedîn's description of Gobi applies to it : ' A regular chaos of sand dunes all linked together, running without a break one into another.' These hillocks appeared to me like petrified waves, from whose crests blew a sandy foam. The station in the centre of this awful desert is called *Pesski*, or ' the Dusty.' The constant danger is that these shifting masses may overwhelm and bury the line. To prevent this wattle screens are erected in the direc-

tion of the prevailing wind. Tamarisk and Saxaöul (*Haloxylon ammodendron*), the only things that will grow there, are planted on the embankment to hold it together. The light of the sun is never veiled here save by the simûm, through the dust of which it glows red, as through fog. Ten miles west of the ancient Oxus begins the territory of the Amîr of Bokhàra. In this green fringe of the desert the Esâri Turkomàns tend their horses, carefully wrapped in camel's hair blankets to preserve their silken skin sheen. Merv is left at 6 p.m. At 2 p.m. next day the train reaches Chârjui. The Turkomàns rove no further to the east than the great river.

The original wooden bridge over the Amû, or ancient Oxus, at Chârjui (Four Springs), was built on 3,300 piles, driven through the sandy bottom into an impermeable substratum. It took seven months to build, being finished in January, 1888. I crossed it twelve years later. It has been replaced by a steel lattice-girder bridge, carrying a single pair of rails, over granite piers 30 feet high. In May, 1888, Samarkànd was reached. Not until 1895 was Tâshkènt joined by rail to this place. That branch, which will now become the main Moscow-Samarkànd line, crosses the Sir-Daria (Jâxârtès) at Chinàz, by a bridge similar to, but smaller than, that at Chârjui. I read in the *Times* a short time ago that the line from Chârjui to Termèz is in process of construction. It is only shown as projected on the map on the wall. I leave to the military correspondent of the *Times* the responsibility for the statement which bears the stamp of probability. I am not able to confirm it from personal observation. It forms, in any case, part of the most direct projected line towards the frontier of India. Russian troops at

'Termèz would be within forty English miles of Mazàr-i-Shérif. This place is on the road from the ruins of Balkh to Khûlm and Tâsh-kûrgàn, about ten miles east of the ruins. From Merv to Kûshk post a branch line, finished in 1897, follows the Murghàb Valley. I could only drive a short way alongside of it. The stations are Yulatàn (the camp to which Salzâ's brigade of Caucasian Rifles was quickly moved from Tiflis five years ago), Bând-i-Sultàn, Imân-Bâba, Âk-tèpé, Pûl-i-Khisti, Kàratèpé, and Kûshkhinski post. The trackless desert to the east of this single line is called the Desht-i-khól. On its southern borders are the âouls of the Kàra Turkomàn; the Aliéli Turkomàn wander to the east of the Murghàb Valley.

Faràb, opposite Chârjui, on the right bank of the Amû, is the headquarters of the Russian steamboat service on the river. The steamers draw about 5 feet. The navigation is difficult owing to the shifting sandbanks. At night-time all craft anchor. From Faràb to 'Termèz upstream is a five to seven days' journey. Downstream to Kungràd about the same. The stations at which the steamer stops between Faràb and 'Termèz are Sàkar-bazàr, Burdàlk, Kerki, whence leads a fair road to Samarkànd, 160 miles away, Jishàk, Kelif, etc. Stores and war material pass by these steamers, but their importance as carriers will diminish as the railway along the left bank comes into use. I do not believe the stories lately circulated as to concentration of large bodies of troops at 'Termèz or Kerki. These tales fall around in Russia like leaves in Vallambrosa every year as the recruits pass to garrisons in Asia from their European homes. It is worth noting that these lines of communication towards the upper Amû, or Oxus, have a great strategical importance. They lead to Mazàr-i-

Shérif and Badakshân. A large Russian force could, in the event of an advance southwards, be brought by these ways into this country. Quartered on the line Mazâr-i-Shérif-Kungrâd-Faizabad (in Badakshân), it could draw a certain amount of food from the country and be also continually fed along its own communications. There is a road that I am told is tolerable from this region to the Dora Pass leading into the Chitral Valley. I do not think that this road is at present passable for troops of all arms, but no doubt it could soon be made so. Perhaps some such thoughts entered the mind of the Russian diplomat who, on hearing of our occupation of Chitral, said: ‘*Vous nous avez fermé la porte au nez.*’

Bokhâra is some ten hours by train from Merv. A branch railway from the main line runs up to its walls. I saw here the revolting dungeon or pit in which our brave countrymen, Stoddart and Conolly, were confined. They were put to death by order of Nasrûlah-Bahâdur, Amîr of Bokhâra, some seventy years ago. The State of Bokhâra counts 1,250,000 Mahomedan inhabitants. The army is 11,000 strong. Of this force 4,000 men, armed with old smooth-bore muskets, are quartered in the city. Bokhâra is in an oasis surrounded by deserts watered by the Wafkân, a tributary of the Zârafshân. The waters of this river, regulated by hatches and locks in Russian keeping, are the food and drink of Bokhâra. No garrison is necessary, for with a few turns of a lever the conquerors can cut off the whole water-supply of the oasis. The relations between these and the conquered races seem satisfactory. In Moslem lands there is always a hidden fire. It broke out at Andijân in 1899, and was quickly suppressed.

The distance from Bokhâra to Samarkând is 140

miles. A good unmetalled carriage-road runs close to the railway through Kerminé to the ancient Marakànda. At Katta Kurgàn the mountains come in sight, the Hissar chain under features, almost, of Alaï and the great Tiànshân. The contrast to the hateful sands is so great that one perhaps overestimates the beauty and resources of this region. We are nearing the cotton and vines of Fergâna. Leaving Bokhàra at 10 a.m., the train arrives at Samarkànd at 7.30 p.m. Samarkànd is divided into two distinct towns: the Russian, not unlike a large Indian cantonment, with broad poplar-shaded avenues, and the native town. Here are the stately ruins of the Bibi-Khânûm, to the memory of 'Timûr's wife, a princess of, I think, the Ming dynasty of China. There are, also, the Gûr-Amîr, 'Timûr's own tomb, and the resting-place of Shâh Zindeh. There are good roads from an Eastern, not Indian, point of view, from Samarkànd to Kerki, on the Amû-Dària, to Tâshkènt viâ Jizâk, and thence to Khokànd, Khôjent, Namangàn, Andijàn, Margelàn, and Osh. I travelled to the latter place from Andijàn on a *tarantàss*, and remember the ruts! Samarkànd yields to Tâshkènt as a military station, but from its central position and good communications is a place of importance. Of all the ruins of Samarkànd, so eloquent in their deserted grandeur, none impressed me as did the Gûr-Amîr. Inside the dome, in front of the horse-hair standard, one feels the presence of Tamerlàne. Beneath the cupola is a nephrite cenotaph, the largest block of green jade in the world. Around it a carved gypsum balustrade. In the crypt below lie the bones of the conqueror of Tòktàmish Khân, of Sultan Bâyzîd, of the Caucasus, Persia, and India.

Tâshkènt is about 110 miles from Samarkànd. The

capital of Central Asia is well placed on the Chirtekik stream, some 1,300 feet above sea-level, and, though hot in summer, is cold enough for furs in winter. The fine new town, with its cathedral, where Kauffman lies buried, observatory, parks, etc., contrasts curiously with the huge but squalid collection of mosques, medressés, and shaded bazaars that make up the old Tâshkènt, and in which 160,000 souls bargain, pray, and lie dormant. The chief importance of this place is that it is the centre of Russian communications in Central Asia. Before the iron horse came three great roads joined here. One to the south, to Khôjent, branching thence eastwards to Margelân, Andijân, and China; to the west to Samarkând and Merv. A second was the post-road viâ Chimbkent, Aulie-Âta, Vernoe, past Lake Balkash to Semipalâtinsk on the Irtysh, 2,000 miles to the north. A third, passing Chimbkènt and Âralsk, led to Orenbùrg. With the creation of the railway system, not yet completed, Tâshkènt becomes the southern apex of an irregular triangle of railways, of which two sides, Samàra-Tâshkènt and Samàra-Tomsk, are finished, and the third, Tâshkènt to Ob on the Siberian line, is projected.

Having now described the Central Asian Railway from personal observations, I must say a word as to its projected continuation, and the alternative line towards India through Persia. The black dotted line on the map shows the former as running from Chârjui along the left bank of the Amû, or Oxus, on Russian territory as far as Kerki. A few miles south of this it crosses the Afghàn border passes near Mazâr-i-Shérif, almost in a direct line to the valley of the Kabul River, Jellalâbâd, and Peshawur. To do this it must, after crossing the Âk-Serai stream, a left affluent of the Upper Amû, or

Oxus, pass either through or over several small mountain masses and the huge main chain of the Hindû-Kûsh. I confess that, for Russian engineers, little accustomed to tunnelling, this seems to me a very difficult as well as a very costly undertaking. Turning to the projected line through Persia, its projectors ignore the treaty that closes the dominions of the Shâh alike to Russian or British railways. The physical obstacles to the laying of this line are not considerable. It is almost finished to the frontier at Jûlfa, on the Aras or Araxes River. Thence it is to proceed past Tabriz to Teherân. At the capital a line is to branch south to Kûm, Isfâhân (Isphahân), Shirâz (where it might meet a line made by us), and thence to Bunder-Abbâs in the Ormûs channel. The main line is to run eastwards from Teherân through Khorassân almost on the old trade route to Meshêd and Kûshk post. Thence it is to be continued to Herât to Farâh. Here it branches again; one line goes towards Seistân, the other to Kandahâr. According to the map, British lines are in course of construction, or projected, to Kandahâr and to Nushki, Kerman, and Shirâz, with a branch to the north through the marshes of Seistân to Meshêd. Of these projected lines to India, that from Kûshk post to Herât and Kandahâr seems to me, speaking academically (without raising the military side of the question), easy and cheap to construct. It is the prolongation of the line Moscow-Orenbûrg-Tâshkènt-Merv-Kûshk post, already constructed. The engineering difficulties in the way are inconsiderable. The Paropisumus chain can be easily crossed; but there is the veto of the Amîr of Afghanistan to be considered. Leaving these questions to the discussion of those amongst my audience so much more fitted to give an opinion than I am on them, I will very shortly describe the Russian military position in Central Asia.

The Russian troops quartered in Central Asia consist of two army corps. The strength of each corps may be taken as in round numbers 38,000 men and 124 guns available for service. It is true that the 'Statesman's Year-book' for 1905 places the strength of a Russian army corps at 47,653 men, but the Turkestàn army corps are not so fully provided with cavalry as those in Russia, and their normal casualty list is very high. Thus, if we put Russia's forces in Turkestàn as from 76,000 to 80,000 men and 248 guns, we shall be close to the mark. The Army List tells us that the First Turkestàn Army Corps has its headquarters at Tâshkènt, and consists of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Turkestàn Rifle Brigades, the 1st Turkestàn Reserve Brigade, the 1st Turkestàn Cossack Division, the 1st Turkestàn Artillery Brigade, the 2nd Orenbùrg Cossack Battery, the Turkestàn Mountain Horse Artillery Battery, and the Turkestàn Sapper Battalion. Reference to p. 106 *et seq.* of the same list shows us that in Tâshkènt are four battalions of riflemen, two battalions of the 1st Turkestàn Reserve Brigade, one Orenbùrg Cossack Regiment (No. 5), the 1st Turkestàn Artillery Brigade, and the Turkestàn Sapper Battalion. At Samarkànd, some ninety-five miles south-west of Tâshkènt, are three rifle battalions, one reserve battalion, one Cossack cavalry regiment, and a few details. The remaining rifle battalions of the First Turkestàn Corps are stationed thus: The 8th at Kâttà-Kurgàn, on the railway from Samarkànd to Bokhàra; the 9th at Margelân; the 11th at Andijàn (terminus of the Central Asian Railway); the 12th at Khokànd, in Fergâna. The whole of the 4th Turkestàn Rifle Brigade, comprising the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th battalions, is stationed at the most unhealthy and dreary town of Termèz, on the Upper

Amû-Daria, about forty-five miles north of Mazâr-i-Shérif.

I will quote the opinion of an officer of the Indian army as to the appearance of the Russian troops in Central Asia: 'It is the characteristic of the English nation to despise and depreciate a rival, and it is to be feared that our appreciation of Russia's military power is derived rather from what we would wish to think it than from what it actually is. It is to be trusted most sincerely that we may never find out our mistake, but these are questions that should be studied carefully and coolly with a mind unbiassed by national training and prejudices. Nothing is more surprising than to observe the fine physique and soldier-like bearing of the Russian soldiers here, so different from the impression generally prevailing amongst Englishmen. The men are great, broad-shouldered fellows, well set up and active, while the officers are a most remarkably intelligent-looking and smartly turned-out lot, and both would compare favourably with any other European troops that I have seen. Both officers and men, too, have a particularly impressive bearing. They carry themselves, as every British soldier is taught to do, as if they were proud of themselves, and yet without the offensively overbearing demeanour of the Prussian soldiers. Altogether the impression derived from such specimens of the Russian troops as are seen about here is most favourable to them.'

The regiments of the Turkestàn Cossack Division are divided into two brigades, the first of which has one regiment, the 2nd Ural Cossacks, at Samarkând; and the other, the 4th Orenbùrg Cossacks, at Kerki, in Bokhàra. The second brigade, with headquarters at New Margelân, has but one regiment there, the 6th Orenbùrg

Cossacks. Its other unit, the 5th of the same, is at Tâshkènt. A Semirèchia Cossack regiment takes the place of the last-mentioned in the brigade at Margelân, where is also quartered the Turkestàn Mountain Horse Artillery Battery. This Cavalry Brigade is intended to act in the valleys of the Sir Dària and Narin. The only unit of the First Army Corps unaccounted for is the 2nd Orenbùrg Cossack Battery. It shares with four rifle battalions the unhealthy quarter of Termèz. A glance at the map will show that, with the exception of the brigade and battery on the river at Termèz, this Army Corps, say 30,000 men, is at Tâshkènt, or on the railway from near Bokhàra to Andijàn. The troops at Osh and Nâmângàn, although off the line, are within six hours' march of it. It is particularly to hold in awe the large native population of Tâshkènt, 150,000 in number, and the Khokàndis, who are turbulent and impatient of restraint, that the First Army Corps is thus disposed. The 8,000 troops, ill-armed, ill-disciplined and worse clothed, paid (occasionally) by the Amìr of Bokhàra and the inhabitants of that ancient city, are controlled by other means. No Russian soldier shows his face there save those of the escort of the Political Resident.

The Second Turkestàn Army Corps has its headquarters at Askhabàd, on the Persian frontier, in the Akhàl-Tekké oasis, which town is at present being patrolled by armed Cossacks. The Tekké Turkomàns number some 750,000 souls. The Yomùts range from the Caspian to Kizil-Àrvàt; the Akhàls roam the oasis thence to Merv. The Sârik Turkomàns line the river Murghâb as far south as the Afghàn border. These nomadic tribes are watched by the Second Turkestàn Army Corps, commanded by the able General Ûssa-

kòfski. His command consists of the 5th, 6th, and 7th Turkestàn Rifle Brigades; the 2nd Turkestàn Reserve Rifle Brigade; the Transcaspian Cossack Brigade; the 2nd Turkestàn Artillery Brigade; 4th Kûbàn Cossack Battery; the Kûshk post Fortress Artillery; and the Transcaspian Sapper Battalion. Of these the whole sixth brigade of four battalions is at Askhabàd.

There are also the 2nd Reserve Brigade, the Geok-Tepé Reserve Battalion, and two cavalry regiments. The 5th Rifle Brigade is along the river Amû, one battalion being near the Aral Sea at Fort Petro-Alexandrovsk, one at Chârjui, and two at Kerki, near the Afghàn border. The 7th Rifle Brigade has two battalions at Merv—one at Saràks and one at Kûshk post. There is one reserve battalion at Krasnovòdsk, on the Caspian, one at Kûshk post. The Transcaspian Sapper Battalion has its headquarters at Merv, but its men are constantly employed along the railway. It will thus be seen that, although the Russian troops in Turkestàn are somewhat scattered, yet they are almost all on the railway. The Turkomàns are watched by one Army Corps, the Khokàndis and Bokhàriots by another. The mountain batteries awe the few mountain tribes, whilst some eight battalions of riflemen observe the Afghàns from the line of the Amû-Daria. It is, of course, possible that a general rising in Turkestàn may take place after the Russian reverses in the Far East. But the Mahomedans of Central Asia are far less fanatical than those of the Caucasus. The Turkomàn is a bad believer; the Tajìks, Ûsbègs, and Sarts are unwarlike people. The Kirghiz are pagan nomads, much scattered. The Bokhàriots are Aryan Mahomedans. There is very little cohesion and no unity existing between these various races.

DISCUSSION.

SIR EDWIN COLLEN : Sir Thomas Holdich, Ladies and Gentlemen,—I am quite sure that we have all listened with immense interest to the admirable lecture which Colonel Beresford has given us, and have gathered a great deal of information, plainly put, with regard to Russia's position in Central Asia. Owing, no doubt, to the shortness of the time at the lecturer's disposal, he was unable to dilate more freely on the enormous difficulties which would follow Russia in any attempt to prolong the railway from Chàrjui and Termèz, on the one side, and from Kùshk post on the other ; and the details were hardly, perhaps, within the scope of Colonel Beresford's lecture, although he alluded to the difficulties which would pursue Russia in carrying on the line from Mazàr-i-Shérif towards the Hindù-Kùsh and the Peshawar Valley. It appears to me that Russia can easily enter Afghàn Turkestàn, but that she would meet with almost insuperable difficulties in her advance to any distance beyond the Afghàn frontier. We have been assured by the late Prime Minister that any further extension of railways towards Afghanistan would be regarded as a hostile enterprise. Afghanistan is not likely to permit such an extension, and if we could possibly obtain from Afghanistan the permission to advance our railway-lines to Kabul and Kandahàr, we should be in a remarkably fine strategic position. To hold this strategic front, and to connect Kabul and Kandahàr by rail, would be essential to any prolonged defence of Afghanistan. I wish once again to express my great appreciation of Colonel Beresford's lecture, and to thank him personally for his kindness in coming to address us this afternoon.

SIR ALFRED LYALL : In expressing my thanks and appreciation to Colonel Beresford for his able lecture, I have nothing to say, being a civilian, on the military question which has been set before us this afternoon with great precision and effect. Colonel Beresford has given us much information concerning Russia's railways, the different places on the lines, and the disposition of troops. I should like to ask him how many troops Russia has enlisted from the population itself of Central Asia, and how her system contrasts in this respect with ours. I am aware that

Russia promotes Asiatics to high offices in the army, but my general impression is that the difference between the two systems might be broadly described by saying that, while Russia has Asiatic officers, but very few Asiatic soldiers, England has no Asiatic officers of high rank, but maintains a larger Asiatic army. I myself shall be disposed to advocate the occasional promotion of our native officers to the upper grades in our military service. It is curious how Afghanistan, the last of the old-fashioned khanates of Central Asia, still blocks up all political and commercial communications across the Asiatic continent. The Amir naturally does not like a great armed Power to project railways towards and into his territory. The mountains are an enormous barrier against any advance; they stop all intercourse, and keep apart two great nations who are jealous of each other. History certainly shows that India has been conquered from the mountains, and Afghanistan commands the passes through these mountains by which all invaders have descended upon India, while no invader has ever been thoroughly successful until he has conquered Afghanistan. Baber himself was only successful when he had made his base firm in Afghanistan, because all his previous inroads were checked and foiled by insurrections of the highland tribes in his rear. But the English, who came into India from the sea-coast, took these natural defences of India in reverse, and have marched up from the sea to the mountains.

LORD RONALDSHAY : I have little to add to the excellent lecture to which we have listened, but, as having travelled extensively in that part of the world to which Colonel Beresford has directed our attention, I should like to make one or two observations. He has spoken of the Orenbùrg-Tàshkènt line which is now in existence. This line has certainly increased Russia's power of massing troops. Colonel Beresford gave the distance between Orenbùrg and Tàshkènt as 1,500 miles. Is this a slip of the tongue, or is it correct? I was told that the distance was 1,600 versts, which would be about 1,000 miles. A correspondent of the *Times of India*, who has been travelling recently in Central Asia, gives the distance as 1,738 versts, or, roughly, 1,150 miles. A projected line spoken of in Russian official circles is from Tomsk to Tàshkènt. I have travelled the whole of the distance that such a railway would follow. There are no engineering difficulties, and official support was promised as soon as the Orenbùrg-Tàshkènt line was completed. I am in a position to

know that advances have been made to contractors for surveys and estimates. For the moment railway schemes are in the background owing to convulsions in Russia, but when she has recovered from her internal difficulties, I think the next line that we shall have to consider will be the link between Central Asia and the Siberian system.

Colonel Beresford spoke of the Tiflis-Erivan line to Julfa, on the Persian frontier. In October, 1905, it was completed to within twenty-five miles of the Persian frontier, and was to be finished within a year. He alluded to the difficulties of railway construction in the Shah's dominions owing to the Secret Convention. I do not think any difficulties stand in the way of Russian railways. The Convention prohibited all but Russian lines. Subsequently less drastic arrangements were made, and Russia was to have the first call. No one was to build railways in Persia until Russia had done so, and she will no doubt begin as soon as she is in a position to undertake the work. As to the Askabad-Meshed line, with a possible extension to Seistan, I have travelled through that part of the country, and it seems to me that a railway-line from north to south would be very difficult of construction, owing to the parallel mountain-ranges which lie transversely across the route. Sir Thomas Holdich will tell you that any attempt to build a line in this direction would be both exceedingly difficult and exceedingly costly. The information that Colonel Beresford has given us about the Russian troops in Central Asia is very important. I am glad to find that he dismissed the idea that Russia possessed a large number in the vicinity of the Afghan frontier. The correspondent of the *Times of India* to whom I have alluded says that Russia has at the present time 200,000 soldiers in different parts of Central Asia, and that large numbers are quartered on the Afghan frontier—1,600 at Kushk post, 10,000 on a war footing at Askhabad—and other figures which he gives show a large army not far from the frontier. Obviously, with the railways which she has constructed and those she has projected, Russia is in a position to amass troops easily so far as transport is concerned. We certainly owe a debt of gratitude to Colonel Beresford for his admirable lecture, and it emphasizes the fact that it is our duty to keep our eyes on the future.

MAJOR MACSWINEY: A point of great importance in the very able lecture which Colonel Beresford has given is the question of

Russia's troops in Central Asia. There is much discrepancy as to the actual number. In 1899 I went through the region to try and substantiate rumours and clear up the mystery of the numbers. My conclusion was, after conversations with General Kuropatkin, who was then Military Governor there, that Russia has a very large force, the bulk being reservists. I have studied the question and watched the returns for seven and a half years. Large numbers go out from Russia ; about 20 per cent. return. What has happened to the balance ? They do not all die. I admit the wastage is considerable, but the majority settle in the large military colonies which Russia has established throughout Central Asia. At Andijân, where the rising took place, the authorities hanged twenty-one mutineers and sent the colony to Siberia. How did repopulation take place ? By means of Russian reservists. The Government gave them ground, and sent for their wives and children. I know, on the authority of a Russian officer, that there are large Russian colonies in Central Asia. Kuropatkin also said to me : ' We have got our mobilization arrangements, just as you have.' Large numbers are sent from Russia proper to Central Asia who are nothing more than reservists who may be mobilized. A gentleman who came from Odessa said that a Russian officer had told him that Russia had 300,000 men under arms in Central Asia. This is a point which must be kept well to the front.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL A. C. YATE : I can perhaps claim to say a few words on the subject which Colonel Beresford has dealt with in so admirable and interesting a manner to-day, because fifteen years ago I visited Tâshkènt, viâ Krasnovòdsk, Merv, and Samarkànd. Colonel Beresford has described Russia's railways in Central Asia in the light of recent experience. In 1890 it was difficult to visit that region, and the fact that I was able to do so was almost an accident. I was in England on leave, and, wishing to use some of the time at my disposal in seeing something of the Russian army, I went to the manœuvres which took place that year at Krasnoe-Selo and Narva. While there, information reached me that an exhibition was about to be held at Tâshkènt, and that the Wagon-Lits Company had been commissioned by the Russian Government to invite strangers to visit it and to arrange for their journey to and fro. I resolved to take advantage of this opening, and sent in my name. After leaving Russia, I spent some time at Berlin and Karlsbad. Still

no permit arrived. Finally I moved to Odessa, and wired thence to St. Petersburg to know whether the necessary permit would be granted to me or not. Within twenty-four hours of the sailing of the last possible steamer from Odessa came a telegram in the affirmative. At Baku I found Sir James Hills-Johnes and Mr. C. E. Biddulph. We three travelled together, and had 'a very good time.' We met with great kindness from General Annenkoff, notably at Jizak, where horses were refused us. (The Samarkând-Tâshkènt line had not then been constructed.) A telegram to General Annenkoff at Samarkând brought an order which the post-master could not ignore. M. Vishnegradsky, the Russian Minister of Finance, travelled in the steamer and train with us from Baku to Samarkând, and at Amu Darya we met Prince Khilkoff, then Annenkoff's assistant, since the Russian Minister of Ways and Communications. I must, however, confine myself more strictly to the subject-matter of the lecture which we have just heard.

As to the Russian troops in Central Asia, I may say that I was greatly impressed by the physique, bearing, and spirits of the soldiers—*i.e.*, the non-commissioned officers and men—but not so much by the officers. Sir Alfred Lyall has asked how far Russia's army in Central Asia is native. I saw not one native soldier, and I was not told that any were employed. I remember at Amû-Daria Station General Annenkoff brought and introduced to us a Colonel who was a Khirghiz and an Adjutant who was a Kalmûk. The impression left by this on me was that these were rather exceptions; but much may have been done in the fifteen years which have elapsed since I was in Transcaspia and Turkestan. May I venture to offer one or two opinions as to the possible future of Russia's railways towards India? Afghanistan at present will have neither our railways nor Russia's. Under these circumstances our best policy seems to be to enable Afghanistan to continue the course she has been pursuing since the late Amîr came to the throne. That course consists in the organization of her army and consolidation of her strength. If Afghanistan holds her own as a strong independent Power, we may wait for the time foretold by the late Amîr in some such words as these: 'When we have a powerful army of our own, we can begin to think about railways and telegraphs.' This opinion will be found in the Amîr's autobiography, published some years ago by Murray. We cannot,

perhaps, rely absolutely on the authenticity of all that the book contains, but I believe it represents the late Amîr's real opinions. If we had as much grit in Persia as in Afghanistan, we might feel that India was safer. But I doubt whether anybody can put backbone into Persia and the Persian Government. Reform in that country seems impossible.

SIR THOMAS HOLDICH : I should like to make a few remarks on one or two points before we tender the thanks of the meeting to Colonel Beresford for his excellent paper. He spoke of the difficulties in extending the line from Kûshk post to the town of Kûshk. There are no mountains in the way ; all that the railway engineers have to do so far is to run the line up the flattened northern slopes of the Koh-i-Baba. As to the main extension of railways in Central Asia, I think we are hasty in assuming that they are all built from purely strategic motives. Had we been in the place of Russia, we should have done as Russia has done. And as for the concentration of troops, we, too, should have found that it was necessary to maintain a large force north of the Oxus, in order to keep so vast a territory in order. But whenever a line passes south of the Transcaspian line it must be regarded as a direct menace to the Afghan frontier. How far these lines have been pushed south is, so far as we know, a matter of doubt. Only one, however, has been carried to a successful conclusion. The road into the Chitral Valley I consider to be impracticable for military purposes, owing to the mass and the altitudes of the mountains. No military railway could ever be maintained across such high mountains and be kept in efficient order all the year round. As to the line due south from Meshèd to Seistân, it would be very difficult to construct. In fact, I cannot conceive of such a line as a rational project so long as the Kandahar-Herât route is available. At some future time, when we and Russia have consented to agree, it is a certainty that the Kandahar-Herât line will be carried out.

As to the troops, I should like to ask what proportion of the Russian Army is Asiatic. We are apt to confuse the words ' Asiatic ' and ' native. ' The term ' native ' is misleading, and is often loosely applied. Colonel Yate says that he saw no ' native ' soldier in the Russian army in Central Asia. He means, I expect, that native soldiers were not derived from the State in which they were born and bred. What I should like to

know is on what terms Russians would meet our Asiatic soldiers in India. I should say that in the whole of the army the pure European Russian element is not a very large proportion, because the Empire contains such a large number of Asiatic subjects, such as Cossacks and Siberians. But whether the troops are Asiatics or Europeans does not matter so long as they are good soldiers. I do not quite agree with what has been said as to the physique of the Russian army. The Cossacks and Guards are certainly exceptionally fine men ; but the infantry of the Oxus frontier I considered distinctly inferior, and amongst them I should say that the proportion of Asiatics to Europeans is about ten to one. But it is not a question as to European or Asiatic ; it is a question of the quality, training, and leading of the troops. Sir Alfred Lyall will forgive me for saying that the English cannot claim to be the first conquerors of India by sea. He overlooked the fact that the Arabs, under Muhammad Kasim, came by sea, successfully occupied Sind, and remained in power for two centuries. Colonel Beresford has given us a most interesting paper, which has led to a useful discussion. We beg to tender him our hearty thanks.

COLONEL BERESFORD: I should like to say a few words with regard to some of the points raised and questions asked by those who have taken part in the discussion. As to the point about the troops belonging to the territory they occupy, there is only one regiment in Central Asia in which this is the case—namely, a division of irregular Turkomàn cavalry, which is in camp near to Askhabàd. I have visited the camp, and seen the horses and men. There are 700 sabres. The married men are allowed leave every year, as an officer told me, to go to see their wives. He remarked that they were faithful husbands, which is more than other Russians are. All cavalry regiments, Cossacks and Kalmùks, are practically Asiatics. The Kalmùks came across the river after the Hun invasion, and settled at Kazàn in masses. The Cossacks have lost much of their value since they became less nomadic. There are many Khirghiz and Turkomàn officers in the Russian army.

As to the distance from Orenbùrg to Tashkent, it is about 1,200 miles ; I am obliged to Lord Ronaldshay for calling my attention to an error which crept into my remarks. Most men in the infantry regiments in Central Asia are Poles. They form the best shooting corps in the army. The climatic conditions

are more favourable, and the physique of the men is good. I cannot say anything now as to loyalty in the army. I should be sorry to depend upon it myself. The Poles are as good fighters as any in the Russian army; they are more intelligent and alert than the Russians. I do not think that the troops available for active service can, under any computation, exceed 100,000 at the outside; there are many reservists who must, of course, be considered potentially. They and their sons are useful warriors. Settlers in past days crept up to the Caucasus, and took care that the mountaineers did not rob them of their lands. The poor Armenians came across the country and pushed inland. They drove the other inhabitants out into Turkey. Then these came back and found the country occupied. This was the beginning of the war. But I am straying from the subject of this afternoon's lecture. There is no difficulty to be overcome in the construction of the line from Kandahâr to Herât. I am exceedingly grateful to you all for the kind way in which you have listened to my remarks, and to Sir Edwin Collen, Sir Thomas Holdich, and the other distinguished gentlemen who have been kind enough to take part in the discussion.

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